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ART. IV.—*The Library of American Biography.* Conducted by JARED SPARKS. Second Series. Volume I. Boston : Charles C. Little and James Brown. 1844. 12mo. pp. 400.

WE several times expressed our views respecting the plan of this work, and the manner in which particular portions of it were executed, while the first series was in the course of publication ; and we regretted its suspension at a time when the lives of many of the most eminent of our countrymen had found no place in its pages. Some work of the kind seems indispensably necessary in order to render the general reader familiar with the history of those whose honor is identified with the honor of his country, and tends, perhaps, in his estimation, to enhance his own. The notices of them contained in biographical dictionaries are too meagre to afford much instruction ; and the more elaborate biographies are in general quite too voluminous for the purpose of such a reader ; while the sketches in a work like this are too short to inspire much weariness, and at the same time long enough to serve to point a moral. Nor is there any want of rich material, much of it yet unwrought. There are the discoverers, who may fairly claim to belong to the country which they brought to light ; the explorers, who penetrated its recesses and laid them open to civilization, as the hardy settler opens the forest-sheltered soil to the sweet influences of the sun ; the pioneers, always a bold and resolute, and sometimes a noble race, wrestling with privation, with savage enemies, and the sharp evils of solitude and sickness, on the spot where, a few years after, their children “ sing the merry songs of peace.” Then comes the long and stately procession of those who established all that constitutes a state ; the warrior, the lawgiver, the statesman, the man of God ; each in his own way giving his powers to the cause of human improvement, and advancing it no less by his example than his labors. Here is surely an array, upon which the painter of life and manners may be long engaged with as much pleasure to himself as profit to mankind. We think it a good augury, that Mr. Sparks has been induced to resume this useful and important work. He has been so long and so honorably employed in building the tombs of the prophets,

that the charge could hardly have been so well confided to another hand ; and, if we are to form a judgment of the volumes which are to succeed from the one before us, the new series will be in no degree inferior in attractiveness and value to the former.

There are two biographies in this volume. The first in order, written by Mr. Sparks himself, is that of Robert Cavalier de la Salle, one of those noble natures which are neither grazed nor pierced by the “shot of accident, nor dart of chance” ; whose grand and gloomy figure stands in somewhat dim outline in the short history of the French ascendancy in this country. Unfortunately, the particulars of his personal history have come down to us only as they are connected with that of his researches and discoveries, and neither has been uniformly recorded by friendly hands. But enough of him has been handed down to show, that, in far-discrimining vision, in resolution, patience, energy, in short, in all the qualities which fit one to devise great enterprises, and to execute them wisely, he stands below no explorer of his own or any other time. Educated, as is supposed, for the church, in a seminary of the Jesuits, he comes to Canada, and is for several years engaged in trade with the same spirit and energy which marked his later and more useful labors. Meanwhile, his mind is fixed upon the grand project of proceeding through the chain of the great lakes, and thence finding his way through some unexplored channel to the China seas. This was the brilliant vision which had misled many lofty spirits of an earlier time ; without impairing, either in their case or in his, the deep practical sagacity which leads to sure judgment in the pursuit of attainable objects. When the return of Marquette and Joliet had assured him respecting the Great River of the West, which they had descended to the confluence of the Arkansas, he knew that its waters mingled with those of the Gulf of Mexico, and vast schemes of colonization and extended empire dawned upon his mind. In Colbert, Louis the Fourteenth’s great minister, he found a spirit like his own. He had previously, with his eye fixed upon this plan of peaceful conquest, obtained a grant of Fort Frontenac, where the waters of the St. Lawrence flow out of Lake Ontario, and had traversed, with considerable vessels, the bosom of that inland sea. He was now, by the letters patent of the king, in-

vested with power to prosecute his plans of discovery, and received a grant of the trade in buffalo skins ; but it was expressly stipulated, that all his projects were to be executed at his own expense. At his own expense, indeed, they were executed ; at the cost of his fortune and his life. This grant was made near the close of the year 1678 ; in nine months from that time, a vessel of sixty tons, built in the wilderness on the river Niagara, rode upon the waters of Lake Erie. Passing through Lake Huron, and crossing Lake Michigan, he cast anchor at the entrance of Green Bay. Here he resolved to send back his vessel, with the furs which his hunters had already gathered, and such as might be obtained at various posts on their return, in order to satisfy his creditors ; while he, and thirteen companions, were to find their way in bark canoes, along the western shore of the lake. Then begins the sad story of disasters, which teach us of what stuff the indomitable man was made.

After proceeding for about six weeks, pressed by hunger and other inconveniences, La Salle and his party reach, on the 1st of November, the mouth of the St. Joseph. His lieutenant, De Tonty, was to join him there with deserters whom he had remained at Mackinaw to collect, and there, too, his vessel was to find a harbour on its return. His expectations are disappointed, and his men, suffering with hunger, begin to murmur ; but he gives them employment in the erection of a fort, and in about a month Tonty appears, without any tidings of the vessel, of which none were ever received. On the 3d day of December, La Salle begins his weary march for the Illinois river, and on the first day of the year 1680, sailing through a beautiful lake, he comes near the spot where the village of Peoria now occupies its site of surpassing loveliness. There he erects Fort Crève-cœur, a name of sad augury, and prepares a vessel, in which he proposes to navigate the Great River to the sea ; but his resources are insufficient for this purpose, and, despatching Father Hennepin, with two others, to find the sources of the Mississippi, the man of iron, with three Frenchmen and an Indian hunter, on the last day of February, sets out on a weary expedition of twelve hundred miles, to procure articles of which he is in need. On arriving at Fort Frontenac, he finds that his vessel, as he had feared, is lost ; he is robbed by his agents of the profits of his trade ; a vessel

laden with merchandise for him has been cast away in the Bay of St. Lawrence ; his canoes have been destroyed in the rapids above Montreal ; his men, at the instigation of his enemies, have plundered and deserted him ; and his creditors have seized his property, and wasted it by hasty sales.

Here were evils enough, one would think, to induce him, at least, to lay his projects of discovery aside ; but their only effect is to make him resolve to descend the Mississippi in canoes, rather than in a larger vessel ; and on the 23d day of July, 1680, he sets out again on his expedition to the Illinois river. In the mean time, all has gone wrong in that quarter ; he reaches, late in November, the mouth of the St. Joseph, and finds his fortress desolate. Those on the Illinois have also deserted, in consequence of difficulties with the natives, which compelled the French to fly. He passes the weary winter at the mouth of the St. Joseph. In the following spring, he returns to Mackinaw ; there he meets with Tonty, who had been left in command upon the Illinois, and heavy indeed are the tidings which each has to communicate to the other ; but we learn from an eyewitness, that La Salle related his with the tone and air of a man who is speaking of ordinary incidents, and without a sign of misgiving or fear, or even doubt of the success of his great enterprise. In the life of this man there was little that went smoothly ; to his last hour, he was destined to struggle with discouragement and difficulty ; and he escaped from them, as Samson broke the withs and cords of the Philistines ; yet nothing in his career is more admirable than the energy with which he bore up and steered right onward, bating not a jot of heart or hope, before a single ray had dawned upon his enterprise, and when all untoward accidents conspired against him. There is something almost sublime in the firm purpose with which he pursued his way, asking no sympathy and receiving none, except that which is extorted by high resolve and an unbending will ; for he sought not to relieve his own perplexities or cares by communion with others ; on the contrary, the only fault, with which those least favorable to him have to charge his memory, is that of too great self-reliance and reserve.

It may well be believed, that Mr. Sparks has selected a noble subject in the history of a man like this ; and he has treated it in a manner worthy of his own reputation. His

task was not a light one ; for the authorities on which he was compelled to rely are consistent neither with each other, nor with themselves, and the stories told by some of them are deeply colored by their prejudices. Yet, even where the prejudice is strongest, it can be perceived, that the writer pays reluctant homage to a commanding character. Father Hennepin, whose unaccountably absurd pretence, that, when sent to explore the Upper Mississippi, he stole down the river to the sea, and thus accomplished the descent before La Salle, has procured for him the reputation of a liar of the first magnitude, is evidently overawed by the superior genius of his commander ; and, in fact, declares, that it was through fear of him that he kept the secret of this excursion to himself, until ten years after La Salle's death. He is one of the authorities on which the biographer is compelled to rely ; and it needs hardly be said, that Mendez Pinto was but a type of him, so far as the art of fabrication is concerned. We are glad to see that Mr. Sparks has done him justice ; showing, in fact, that the worthy father stole his materials for the account of his pretended voyage down the Mississippi from Le Clercq's narration of the proceedings of the missionaries in Canada. Le Clercq's information was derived from the letters of Father Zenobe, who was one of La Salle's companions in the expedition.

The work ascribed to Tonty is another authority, of questionable character ; it was published in Paris, while he was in this country, without his knowledge, and though believed to have been compiled from his notes, has been embroidered with various inventions, resembling in a small way the magnificent ones of Father Hennepin, and disfigured by numberless errors, by the ignorance or carelessness of the book-maker. Charlevoix is another authority, though he writes from the information of others ; but his work is strongly tinctured with his prejudices. It was no easy task to disentangle truths from the errors and contradictions of authorities like these, as many writers, ourselves among the rest, have found ; but Mr. Sparks has done this with great industry and ability, and has thus rendered his narrative of great historical value. The year in which La Salle accomplished his descent of the Mississippi has been not unfrequently regarded as doubtful. So far as this remained a question, it is set at rest by Mr. Sparks, who found in the archives of the Ma-

rine Department, at Paris, a most interesting document, of which he gives a translation, entitled, “*Procès Verbal* of the taking possession of Louisiana, at the mouth of the Mississippi, by the Sieur de la Salle, on the 9th of April, 1682.” This document contains an account of the whole expedition, attested by the signatures of La Salle and his party. From the same source is derived an interesting petition of the Chevalier de Tonty, La Salle’s companion, to the Minister of Marine, setting forth his various services, and desiring that a company may be obtained for him, that he may continue to serve the king in Canada. This paper has no date, but is supposed by Mr. Sparks to have been written in 1690. The account of La Salle’s last disastrous voyage, and of his foul murder, rests upon the authority of his companions, Joutel and Father Anastase.

Probably few intelligent travellers now ascend the Mississippi or the Illinois, without thinking of the enterprising pioneer, who fell a victim, in the vigor of his manhood, to his generous ambition. One could fondly wish, that, before he found his bloody grave in the wilderness, the curtain of the future had been for a moment lifted, that he might see what, after the lapse of scarcely a century and a half, is presented to our eyes ; the valley of the Mississippi, — described by the philosophic French traveller as the most magnificent dwelling place ever prepared by Providence for man’s abode, a valley hardly inferior in extent to the Roman empire, — filled with millions of the prosperous, the active, and the free ; with the surges of population rushing over it, and spreading themselves in nations over its beautiful and fertile meadows, and under the shadow of its noble forests ; and the mighty river itself, aptly styled by the Indian the Father of Waters, with its numberless tributary streams, bearing the wealth of a continent upon their bosom ; their banks adorned with noble cities, the seats of opulence and luxury, or brightened by a magnificence of vegetation, such as hardly any other land can show ; flowing through regions of ice, and genial breezes, and scarcely ending summer, through the land of the corn, the cotton, the orange, and the sugar-cane ; no longer a colony of France, or England, or any foreign dominion, but rising with the power and majesty of self-sustaining empire. Such a prospect might have been a fit

reward for a lofty genius, destined to as dark a fate as misfortune ever knew.

The next and only other biography contained in this volume is that of Patrick Henry, written by Mr. Alexander H. Everett. This extraordinary person, the "forest-born Demosthenes," as Lord Byron, with more poetry than accuracy, styles him, is as well known to distant readers by the glowing narrative of Mr. Wirt, as he is to Virginians by the traditions derived from those who witnessed and felt his extraordinary power. Were it not, in fact, for the emphatic testimony of those who knew him well, and were not likely to be affected by mere declamation, one would be tempted to think, that Mr. Wirt, a man incapable of deception, had invested his subject with coloring drawn from his own fancy. The remains of his eloquence which have come down to us, though bold and vigorous, are not sufficient to explain the secret of his commanding influence over the minds of men. Mr. Everett ascribes it to the naturally keen sensibility, which enables the true orator to act upon the moral part of our nature by stirring and successful appeals to the passions; and to the undaunted courage and overwhelming energy of character, which send the shafts of oratory directly to the mark. These were qualities which Henry possessed in a very eminent degree. Literary accomplishments he had next to none, for his early advantages of education were not great, and he was not inclined to improve the few that he had; his argumentative power was not remarkable, though he had, like Chatham, the talent of giving his assertions the force of conclusions; but there was in him nothing pusillanimous, nothing wavering; while others were deliberating, he was on his way; and he added to all this the external qualifications of a stately person, a commanding eye, and one, of those voices which attract and enchain the hearer, like an enchanter's spell. Unfortunately, like many other orators of first-rate excellence, he either did not possess, or did not cultivate, the art of writing; so that the memorials of his eloquence, existing in the form of reports of his speeches, give as imperfect an idea of them, as they flowed from his tongue, as the mummy does of the grace and beauty of the living form. Tradition is, after all, the only evidence which attests the reality of his inspiration, and its almost miraculous sway; there is, however, nothing questionable in that tradi-

tion ; and the world is under deep obligation to Mr. Wirt for collecting and preserving all that was remembered of a man of extraordinary genius, exhibited in a department in which commanding excellence is rare ; for though speakers, copious and able ones too, are as numerous among us as the most patient auditor could desire, not many have there been, in any age, like the orators of Athens, "the eye of Greece," and mother of arts and rhetoric, —

" Those ancients, whose resistless eloquence
Wielded at will that fierce democratie,
Shook the arsenal, and fulminated over Greece
To Macedon and Artaxerxes' throne."

There is, however, a satisfaction to the reader in turning from the gorgeous descriptions of Mr. Wirt to the graver, but well considered and finely written, biography of Mr. Everett. We have no space to enter into a full exposition of its particular merits ; but no one can fail to derive gratification from the calm and fair examination of the remarkable portions of Henry's life and rhetorical victories, which presents them all in clear but not dazzling light, and, instead of lessening, rather exalts our estimate of his ability and general character. The effect of the whole is greatly aided by Mr. Everett's profound acquaintance with the constitutional history of our country.

A very curious note is appended by Mr. Sparks, the editor, to that part of the biography which treats of the celebrated Resolutions, offered by Patrick Henry in the House of Burgesses of Virginia, on the 29th of May, 1765. As originally adopted, they were five in number ; but the fifth was, two days afterwards, expunged from the journals of the House. When the Resolutions were circulated through the country, they produced a sensation which is not to be accounted for by any thing contained in them as they were actually passed. The fifth, the rescinded one, was the boldest ; but even this went no further than the declared sentiments of the Assemblies of Massachusetts and New York had gone before. Governor Fauquier, in a letter to the Lords of Trade, giving an account of the proceedings of the House of Burgesses on this subject, states, that those who presented the Resolutions had two more in reserve, which they were deterred from offering by the difficulty they experienced in carrying the fifth, which was adopted only

by a majority of one vote. It seems, that a spurious copy of the Resolutions was first circulated in the newspapers, and afterwards printed in the "Prior Documents," Gordon's and Ramsay's histories, and Marshall's Life of Washington. In this copy, the third resolution is altogether omitted ; the fifth essentially altered from Mr. Henry's draft ; and two others added, which were never adopted by the Assembly, and respecting which there is no evidence that Henry wrote, or had even seen them. These are believed by Mr. Sparks to be the two alluded to by Governor Fauquier. They are far bolder and more decisive than those which were actually passed ; and going forth to the world, as they did, by this strange accident, with the erroneous impression, that they were sustained by the authority of the Virginia Assembly, they had an extraordinary influence upon the public mind ; an influence which the actual Resolutions, emphatic and earnest as they were, were not calculated to exert.

ART. V.—*The Works of the Rev. SYDNEY SMITH.*
Second Edition. In Three Volumes. London : Longmans & Co. 1840. 8vo.

FEW persons on either side of the Atlantic are ignorant of the name of the Rev. Sydney Smith, the wit, the whig, the Edinburgh reviewer, and the holder of Pennsylvania bonds. But if we except his lately published "Letters on American Debts," his name is more familiar than his writings. It is not a matter of surprise, that the brilliant petulance and grotesque severity of the "Letters" did not win him many admirers in the United States. The fact, that they insulted our national pride, and were unjust and sweeping in their censures, was sufficient to prevent their singular merit, as compositions, from being acknowledged. After having withstood all the falsehood and exaggeration of the London press,—a press which, in the sturdy impudence with which it retains its hold upon a lie, excels all others in the world,—we felt irritated, that a "pleasant man had come out against us," with the expectation that we were to be "laid low by a joker of jokes." A more thorough knowledge of Smith's